Samuel Rutherford and John Calvin are **nearly identical** in the substance of their theology regarding election, but they differ in **emphasis and precision**.

While Calvin provided the biblical foundations for Reformed theology, Rutherford represents the "High Calvinism" of the 17th century—a period where the theology became more systematic, precise, and polemical in response to the rise of Arminianism.

Here is the breakdown of how Rutherford compares to Calvin and modern TULIP theology.

1. Alignment with TULIP (Current Day Reformed Theology)

Rutherford was a strict adherent to what we now call TULIP. In fact, he was arguably **more rigid** on these points than Calvin, largely because he was writing specifically to refute the Arminian "Remonstrants" who had arisen after Calvin's death.

- **Total Depravity:** Rutherford affirmed that the will is in "bondage" and cannot cooperate with grace without first being renewed.
- **Unconditional Election:** He held that God chose the elect based solely on His secret counsel, not on any foreseen faith.
- **Limited Atonement (Definite Redemption):** Rutherford was a fierce defender of this doctrine. In his treatise *Examen Arminianismi*, he argued that if Christ died for all men equally, then Christ failed in His mission for those who perish. He famously argued that Christ's love is "particular" and "husband-like," not a general benevolence to all.
- **Irresistible Grace:** He taught that the Spirit's call to the elect cannot be ultimately resisted.
- **Perseverance of the Saints:** He frequently wrote to assurance-plagued believers that their salvation depended on Christ's hold on them, not their hold on Christ.

2. The Key Difference: The Order of Decrees

The main technical difference between Rutherford and Calvin (and the majority of modern Reformed believers) is the **logical order** in which they believed God decreed election.

- **John Calvin (Ambiguous/Infralapsarian):** Calvin rarely speculated on the logical *order* of God's decrees. However, most scholars classify him as **Infralapsarian** (or "Sublapsarian"). This view holds that God logically first decreed to create man, then permitted the Fall, and *then* elected some to salvation.
- **Samuel Rutherford (Supralapsarian):** Rutherford was a **Supralapsarian**.[1] He believed that God's decree to elect a people for His glory was the **very first** thought in the mind of God, logically preceding even the decree to create the world or permit the Fall.

Why this matters:
For Rutherford, election was not just a "rescue plan" for a fallen world; it was the primary reason the world was created. He believed God created the universe specifically as a stage to

display His glory through the election of the saints. This makes his view of election feel "higher" and more all-encompassing than the standard view held by many modern Presbyterians (who follow the Westminster Confession's slightly more moderate Infralapsarian phrasing).

3. Tone and Application

While their doctrine was similar, their "delivery" differed due to their contexts:

- **Calvin (Pastoral):** Calvin discussed election primarily to give comfort to believers—to assure them that their salvation was secure in God's hands. He often warned against speculating too deeply into God's "secret will."
- **Rutherford (Scholastic & Experiential):** Rutherford was a paradox. In his academic writings (like *Examen Arminianismi*), he was a dry, rigorous Scholastic who debated the minutiae of how God's will operates. Yet, in his *Letters*, he turned that same doctrine into a passionate, almost romantic pursuit of Christ.[2] He combined the **highest logic** with the **deepest emotion**.

Summary Table

Feature	John Calvin (1509–1564)	Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661)
System	Biblical / Humanist	Protestant Scholastic
TULIP Alignment	Foundational (Pre-TULIP formulation)	Strict / Explicit Defender
Lapsarian View	Infralapsarian (Implicitly)	**Supralapsarian** (Explicitly)
Atonement	Definite (though some debate exists)	Strictly Limited / Definite
Primary Antagonist	Rome / Libertines	Arminianism / Prelacy

Next Step

Since you are interested in Greek textual analysis and the "experiential" side of theology, I can find a specific example from Rutherford's *Letters* where he uses his high view of **Unconditional Election** to comfort a believer who is suffering or doubting. Would you like to see that?